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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN POLICE THREATEN STRIKE

Classified By: Consul General Brian Browne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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11. (U) Junior-level police officers, from the constable to superintendent ranks, have threatened strike on February 20. While most observers believe a deal will be struck in time to avert the strike, police officers in contact with the Consulate's security office continue to insist that their threats are serious. End Summary.

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Police Officers Threaten Strike over Poor Wages, Conditions  
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12. (U) Junior officers of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) are threatening to strike beginning Monday, February 20. Inter alia, the officers are seeking monetization of benefits, such as housing, transportation, and travel, increased wages, disbandment of the female mobile squad, and resignation of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sunday Ehindero. The GON recently converted benefits for workers in parastatals to cash payments, but did not extend the policy to other civil servants, like the police.

13. (C) The officers are acting under the National Union of Policemen (NUP). However, this informal union does not have a legal right to exist. Workers deemed "essential," like policemen, are legally prohibited from unionizing or organizing strikes. NUP leaders use assumed names and meet secretly, exchanging messages by police radio and threatening

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action against policemen who do not strike. NUP claims to employ an "armed monitoring unit" to ensure there will be no strike-breaking and, in a press statement, warned Nigerians to stay at home as the police would not be responsible for any crime committed against them. (Comment. In an ironic twist that would appear all so remarkable but for this being Nigeria, a large portion of the police force is threatening to commit a crime. Moreover, by their surreptitiousness in organizing the strike, they have adopted the tactics of the criminal class they are paid to pursue. End Comment.)

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President Warns Police Chiefs to Avert Strike  
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14. (U) In a February 13 public statement, President Obasanjo warned there would be no leniency for any policeman who strikes. Although recognizing the need to improve police salaries and work conditions, Obasanjo made it clear that an organized strike would be considered illegal. In hopes of defusing the situation, Obasanjo used the statement to establish a panel to look into wholesale reforms of the police force. Senior police officers as well as the Nigerian Labor Congress feel a deal will be struck in time to avert the strike. However, one junior officer told our security office he "didn't care what the President said." Nigerians should prepare for a strike, the officer exclaimed.

15. (C) Two years ago, junior-level police officers undertook a half-day strike for much the same reasons. For officers assigned to the consulate, our Regional Security Office provided clothing to cover their uniforms out on patrol, or officers worked in civies. That strike was considered a success.

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Comment  
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16. (C) Whether this strike happens will depend on a two-tier process. On one tier, will the GON and the leaders of the potential strike be able to negotiate their way out of this nettle and toward an amicable settlement. If this descends to a more confrontational level, then the issue of

the strike becomes a function of the GON's ability to compel the police to man their posts in contrast to the strength of the NUP leadership to maintain unity in the face of GON anti-strike pressure. Obasanjo's willingness to acknowledge police suffer from poor working conditions and low wages lends hope that a settlement is in the offing. However, both sides will have to abandon some of their hardline positions. In the meantime, the public is caught in the middle and is likely to suffer the most should the strike take place. End Comment.

BROWNE